

Hello Chairman Uecker and Members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Corrections, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today!

My name is Donna Gibson and I am the Coordinator for Bridges Out of Poverty (BOP) and Parent Support with Mental Health America in Licking County and a member of the Newark Think Tank. I currently do three classes at the Licking County Justice Center (LCJC). The classes are called Getting Ahead "Stepping Stones". We work to learn financial literacy, budgeting, communication skills, improve social skills, job applications and resume building. Improving personal self-esteem and self-concept is also an important part of the work which is done. I have had the opportunity to work with well over 200 individuals since I began this program at the LCJC. Over 95% of the individuals in my program at the LCJC have mental health issues. I invite participants to stay connected with my program so that I am able to connect them with much needed resources upon release from jail. The BOP program is on such resource.

It is absolutely heart breaking to speak with people who have been returned to jail several times over due to mental health issues which have not been addressed or because they were not able to continue treatment outside of jail. When someone tells you they feel safer in a jail then you know there are some serious issues in your communities and in the state of Ohio. No one chooses to have a mental health issue. It is inhuman to ignore the crisis by not ensuring adequate funding, which in turn eliminates services, which keeps people helpless and in a constant cycle of recidivism. When we do not help those in need have the ability for a better tomorrow by withholding funds for important services then we essentially become the problem instead of the solution. Please use your voice to ensure that this increase in funds for mental health inside the prisons is not eliminated during the budget negotiations.

Bridges Out of Poverty (BOP) removes barriers which inhibit personal and financial growth and to provide support and education without bias, stereotype or prejudice and insure that people, regardless of their situation or economic status, will be afforded equal opportunities in education, employment and life goals.



